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ABSTRACT

A graduate course on research and technical writing, intended for international students planning to publish papers in English-language journals and present their work at English-language conferences, is described. The course curriculum includes: (1) development of summarizing and paraphrasing skills, in order to provide students with the ability to recontextualize others' work, using oral summaries of textbook material and interactive note-taking techniques; (2) information on which journals might publish student works at various points (this is done by using coordinated writing assignments that analyze journals from different perspectives, including audience expectation) in their careers; (3) instruction in writing grant proposals and doing research projects; (4) preparation for writing essay exams, through practice with impromptu in-class essays with peer editing and class discussion; and (5) participation in weekly conferences. Guidelines for notetaking, essay and term paper writing, peer editing, and impromptu writing are included. Issues addressed in the implementation of the course are discussed briefly, including the question of whether American and international students should be mixed in advanced level classes, how to get shy students to participate actively, and how the instructor compensates for lack of subject-area knowledge about student writing topics. (MSE)

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Life After Graduate School: Skill Development for International Scholarship

Anne Wyatt-Brown

International graduate students need to develop a high level of writing and editing skills if they plan to publish papers in English language journals and to present their work in English at international conferences (Swales 1987:41-44). Research and Technical Writing, a graduate level course at the University of Florida, seeks to provide that high level of training. The curriculum emphasizes the following points: First, summarizing and paraphrasing skills are developed to teach students how to recontextualize the work of other researchers in their own projects. Rather than the textbook exercises advocated by Braine (TESOL '89), oral summaries of textbook material and interactive notetaking techniques are emphasized. Second, to teach students which journals might publish their work at various points in their career, they do a series of coordinated writing assignments that analyze the journals from multivariant perspectives, including audience expectations (Walzer 1985: 156). Third, a grant proposal, which makes a strong case for the viability and usefulness of their work, is followed by the writing of some portion of their research project, the exact nature of which is negotiated by each student. Fourth, in-class impromptus prepare students for writing essay exams of all kinds and foster the integration of their writing and learning experiences. Peer editing and class discussion encourage collaborative learning. Fifth, weekly conferences, based on the principles of Vygotsky's (1986) zone of

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proximal development, stimulates students to develop a more productive relationship with their advisors. Finally, I will end with a few words about some recent experiences with the course which have raised some new questions about pedagogy.

Planning the course

Although many ESL courses began as an effort at remediation, the influx of international graduate students has encouraged ESL writing teachers to expand their horizons. Clearly graduate students have needs that differ from undergraduates, and Swales (1987) has already made a strong case for including the kind of thinking and writing that our students would need in their professional lives. For some time, however, the emphasis has been on providing the kinds of writing experiences that students would encounter in their course work (West & Byrd, 1982; Spack, 1988; Horowitz, 1986; Canesco & Byrd, 1989), and there has been a lively argument about the writing teacher's obligation to introduce the student to individual discourse communities (Shih, 1986; Horowitz, 1986; Spack, 1988). On the first point, my view is that the courses must reach beyond the students' immediate needs to consider their later writing situations. A good bit of my paper is devoted to achieving that goal. On the second matter, I think we face an intractable problem. Although graduate students have already been introduced to their individual discourse communities—indeed they can help the writing teacher learn that language as well—at times the instructor may feel herself an

inadequate judge of the content of their papers because few of us are experts in technical fields. Although this dilemma is obviously crucial to our role as instructors, I would prefer to discuss it at the end of my paper.

Designing the course has been an on-going process. The classes are mixed in ability, research experience, fields, and languages. It is advanced, but for a variety of reasons less advanced students often enroll in it. To devise a course that would meet the needs of such a varied group, I consulted numerous graduate students and faculty about the kinds of writing they had to master, and using Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) made a list of the kinds of writing and thinking skills professionals need. Later on, I was delighted to read Maxine Hairston's 1986 essay, in which she sensibly pointed out that professional writing varied in character. Sometimes it could be highly formulaic (letters of reference), at other times more extensive but self-limiting (reports like self-studies), but occasionally it could demand a high level of creativity. Even the latter category (journal articles and grant proposals) can involve a certain amount of formulaic writing as well. Hairston's comments gave me the courage to share usable formulas with the students while encouraging more imaginative and process centered approaches when appropriate.

Paraphrasing and context

One fascinating aspect of teaching this course over a period

of years has been the way in which I have had the chance to develop and deepen the potential of many of the assignments, largely as the result of stimulating papers at TESOL meetings. For example, for some time I had asked the students to present chapters from the textbook (Huckin & Olsen, 1983). My purpose was to encourage the class to read the material and to participate in a meaningful way. International students often have no prior experience in interacting with their professors, and in many cases have not developed the ability to use their inner voice for planning purposes in the way that Vygotsky (1986) describes.[1] Giving presentations, I thought, would encourage classroom participation, and build the students' confidence.

Over the years I have learned that this assignment serves several disparate purposes. It provides students with experience in oral presentations, a skill they need to survive graduate school. Moreover, at the same time it allows them to give the kind of lecture presentation—including carefully prepared visual aids—that otherwise never happened in my class. By such means

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[1] The road to developing this problem solving inner speech is complex indeed. Donald Winnicott (1958) describes the way in which Western middle-class children first learn "to be alone, as an infant and small child, in the presence of mother" (1958: 30). Under benign circumstances children use such moments for imaginative play, much of which leads to a discovery of their inner lives and sense of authentic self. If all goes well, the child learns to respect his play and his thoughts. Those thoughts, according to Piaget and Vygotsky, become internalized later in life (Piaget, 1959; Vygotsky, 1986) and can be used to problem solve in general and to make plans for writing in particular. If as Piaget (1959) asserts, the adult always imagines an audience of collaborators or opponents, our job as writing teachers is to encourage students to think of the other as the former.

several things are accomplished. The students learn a skill they need; from the critique of the class they get badly needed advice about improving their visual aids. (Not all departments teach students how to use these tools despite the students' need for such instruction.) Students also learn from teaching themselves. They discover that they can provide for themselves the familiar environment for which they long, but one enriched by class interaction. If the students don't ask questions or interrupt, I do.

Still more important, they gain skills that indirectly enhance their writing. At last year's international TESOL, George Braine (1989) discussed the importance of paraphrasing, a point previously made by Ruth Spack (1988). As a result of Braine's presentation, I reassessed the classwork and found that student presentations demanded good paraphrasing skills. Best of all the practice was meaningful because the students wanted to learn what the textbook had to say. Although many begin by borrowing the words and the charts of the text, they quickly learn how boring such an approach is. Repeating the words of the text may be a first and necessary step in presentation, but quickly they get the idea that echoing the text is unnecessary when the rest of the class has already read it. Students report that early in the semester they spend a long time on the presentations, but eventually learn to shorten their preparation time dramatically.

Interactive note taking on the computer is another skill

that is explicitly taught. My goal is to help students begin the process of decontextualizing what they read so that they will be able to recontextualize it in their own writing. Most students, particularly at the beginning of graduate school, treat articles with reverence when they need to use them more instrumentally. The questions that I ask them in HOW TO TAKE NOTES are calculated to start them thinking and evaluating from the beginning of their reading. By putting their ideas in brackets, they have already begun the process of sorting through their ideas and writing. By the time they come to write a paper, they have already generated some useable ideas.

In fact, thinking about paraphrase has led me to the realization that the chief difficulty in writing a literature review, for example, is being able to provide a sensible paraphrase of someone else's words. The students struggle to understand the context that the writer is providing, but ultimately must remove the relevant point from the writer's context and recontextualize it within the boundaries of their own project. That explains why so often their reviews are too long. They do not decide which aspects of their predecessor's research are entirely germane to their own work. Before tackling such a complex problem, it helps to learn to paraphrase something far simpler, namely the textbook.

Journal articles

From the course's inception, another of its important goals

has been to provide the students the kind of training for professionalism that I had never experienced as a graduate student. As a result, when I was first trying to place my work, I made multiple mistakes in selecting journals that might have appreciated my kind of writing, and learned all of my lessons the hard slow way. (A recent conversation with a new assistant professor in the UF history department suggested that I was not alone in facing this problem. The professor complained that she lost much time in her battle for tenure because she sometimes miscalculated which journals might want to accept her work.) I felt the time had come to provide the students both the time and the impetus to analyze the journals in their fields so that they could develop a clear idea about which ones they needed to read and which ones might accept their articles at varying points in their career. To that end I have devised assignments that would ask questions that they would not encounter in their courses, questions calculated to make them sophisticated users of journals.

The assignments, a critique of three journal articles and a comparison/contrast of three journals have also evolved over time. I would like to make a few observations based on several years of experience. First, the criteria of judgment I establish in INSTRUCTIONS FOR ESSAYS AND TERM PAPER are calculated to move the students away from matters of content to more structural questions that are more easily explained to other students from different fields. My class always has one of the broadest mixture of students possible: they come from different countries,

different fields, and different levels of prior research experience. Some of the students are experienced professionals, while others have just begun their graduate work and have no idea what their research topics will be. The questions have to be flexible enough to allow for their different levels of education, and worded so that the student will avoid the problem of baffling part of the audience.

What generally happens in the course of the semester is that the students teach each other—and me—how to understand their work better. Visual aids—including writing on the blackboard—help them explain briefly what the articles are about. Then they answer the specfic questions, which can be divided into two categories. The small ones cover the organization of the articles—including both the macro and the micro environments—their intended audiences, the paper's methodology, and the kinds of references used. The large ones ask them to evaluate the usefulness of the article to the field and to their own work.

Sometimes the students make wondrous discoveries. A few weeks ago, a student reported that one writer referred chiefly to his own work, while the references of an acknowledged leader in his field read like a who's who of famous researchers. Obviously the second scholar was a more reliable provider of references for the reader. The student reported that henceforward she would read reference pages before she tackled articles.

Of course, the larger questions are the most important; namely, which articles are the most important in the field and

for one's own project. But, after considering the smaller points, the students develop a better sense why some articles are important to them, but not necessarily to the field. The reports also indicate that the needs and interests of students change over time. They discover that although early in graduate school they review older and less technical work, including many literature reviews, as they get closer to writing their dissertations they often turn to cutting edge research reporting.

The comparison/contrast of journals teaches students to decide which journals they must read, and to consider which ones might possibly publish their work. Again they begin to understand that it makes perfect sense for them to start with less prestigious journals for their early projects, and postpone the more distinguished journals for later. (Of course, in some fields they find it worthwhile to gamble on acceptance at a top journal. One article in a leading economics journal counts as much as five in lesser ones. Another student commented that the quality of the review is worth the $200.00 cost of submission.) My hope is that talking about such matters encourages a more realistic attitude on the part of the neophyte publisher. By asking the students to consider practical requirements—as well as the referee process, the composition of the board, and the kind of work the journal actively solicits—I hope they will avoid the embarrassment I once faced when I failed to find the instructions to authors where I expected them to be. This journal placed the instructions on the back page, and I was used

to finding them at the front. I sent out two copies of my paper when the instructions clearly called for four. When I discovered the page, I had to send along more copies with a letter of apology, but luckily the article was accepted despite my ineptness. In some fields the variety of journals is extraordinary, and it makes no sense, for example, to submit a theoretical article to a research based journal.

Grant proposals and journal articles

Writing journal articles and grant proposals are the climactic writing assignments in the course because they constitute the most important writing in the lives of many professionals (Johns, 1989). In some fields grant writing literally provide the money for research, and researchers are judged by their ability to collect large sums. In the humanities, however, big grants are less common, and journal articles and books are essential. (Often number of pages counts most; not all promotion and tenure committees actually read the work.) Because students come from many different fields, both kinds of writing need to be stressed.

Despite the importance of grants, few departments explicitly teach students how to do them (West & Byrd, 1982). Lucky students are given personal instruction by their advisors, but many are supposed to pick up these skills on their own. Our textbook, Huckin and Olsen (1983) has an excellent chapter, which includes a chart that describes the various reasons why grants are turned down (pp. 225-226).

Students usually respond enthusiastically to the chapter and to the assignment because they recognize how important it is. The chief difficulty they encounter is the need to persuade a committee about the value of their project. By the time we come to this point in the course, however, students have had much practice talking to and about non-technical audiences, and have presented their work from a variety of perspectives. As a result, they find it much easier to argue persuasively for the worthiness of their research.

Teaching grant writing also offers an opportunity to talk to them briefly about career planning. For example, in many fields post-doctorate fellowships are available and offer the best way of gaining expertise quickly. Sometimes shy international students get little counselling from their advisors. One new faculty member at UF is now struggling to get grants and publications without any assistance from anyone else. She gets turned down because of lack of experience. If she had taken a post-doc, her plight would have been considerably alleviated. I have the uneasy feeling that I am the first person to discuss career plans with this talented faculty member, but I am doing so because I know the way most P&T committees judge junior faculty.

Impromptus

Impromptu writing serves many useful purposes, I have discovered. West & Byrd (1982) point out that few departments teach students to write exams, yet they are a pervasive kind of

writing. Competency testing at every level demands that students write quickly on a topic about which they have given no prior thought (Wolcott, 1987). Because students must pass such tests in order to continue their careers, they need to learn to write under pressure. Comprehensive essay exams offer little time for a student to discover her meaning whereas a five paragraph essay featuring a prominently placed thesis statement will go a long way to guarantee a passing grade.

At the same time writing many impromptus can expand the students' horizons. (We do about 7 or 8 per term.) I have devised a method for combining some invention elements with some clearly defined forms (IMPROMPTU WRITING). If the students first consider their response to the question and then analyze its wording with care, they will learn to construct a workable essay in a short period of time. Moreover, they are encouraged to revise their first efforts so that they can reframe their essays if necessary. Sometimes they are just beginning to see what they want to write when the time is up. Revision gives them the satisfaction of achieving the elusive goal they have barely defined. To increase the level of sophistication of the assignments, the questions I ask often involves their reflecting on their writing and learning experiences. Not only do the students learn to organize quickly, but my questions force them to articulate what they have been learning. For example, I might ask them the various ways in which they have learned to paraphrase from the assignments in the course. At other times I can solicit

feedback on the course. This fall I asked what kinds of assignments the students expected, and when discussing the writing I was able to examine some of the conflicting goals they stated. Many of them equate a writing class with grammar lessons. By such means I hope to temper the students' expectations of what they can accomplish in one semester. Their comments certainly were enlightening for me.

This semester I have increased the level of difficulty of the impromptus because several American students have joined the class, some of whom are in linguistics and have a professional interest in learning how to teach this kind of course. To my joy, many of the foreign students have opted for the harder questions I thought the Americans would pick and have displayed their impressive analytical skills. Once again, I have discovered that we tend to underrate the ability of international students to write because of their errors. They often handle the harder assignments better than easier ones because they are engaged by the questions.

Another method of enhancing the students' writing is by teaching them to peer edit effectively (PEER EDITING). Here I encourage the principles of Peter Elbow's (1973) believing game. Left to their own devices, at first students are content to praise anything. Later on they correct spelling and grammar mistakes, but they find it hard to become a useful audience. Elbow's point is that they must try to enter into the writer's world and try to see what the author is trying to accomplish.

That empathy will encourage the student to write more and eventually to listen when the reader tells the writer how the writing makes her feel. A critical approach can point out errors but rarely stimulate the writer to a heightened creativity. As the writer E.M. Forster said, critics taught him to remove the sudden deaths from his novels, but did not suggest what he should put in their place. Elbow insists that the best message a critic can give is a personal one; namely, to tell how a passage strikes her. Such a response, however, will encourage the writer to try harder the next time. To speed up the process of improving peer editing, my teaching assistant devised a short response sheet that each student fills out to give to the person whose paper she has been reading.

Conferences

In the meantime, the individual conferences are providing another sort of editing experience. On the whole I try to abide by Elbow's (1973) principles of engaged reading. Of course, I also circle obvious errors—international students would feel cheated if I didn't and my pencil has a life of its own—but the purpose of the conference is not correction so much as modeling a kind of collaborative behavior. The principle of Vygotsky's (1986) zone of proximal development is to see how far the student can go with a rich collaborative experience. Many students are afraid to waste the instructor's time, and they do not know how to become the sort of promising student whom advisors like to groom for

success. By explicitly talking about such issues, I think that some of the international students will learn to ask questions and reveal their skills to their professors. Although some of them will never assert themselves, others may be selected to be taught to make presentations or to write grants. When I discuss such matters, all of the students respond positively.

Conferences also can help the writing teacher improve her teaching techniques. Students will give feedback on intractable class problems, such as how to get quiet students to talk. They will speak up if the assignments seem unclear or pointless, which can allow the teacher to modify the assignment or to try to convince the student. Such feedback is absolutely critical when experimenting with the course or considering a change in the curriculum.

Queries

Although presentations of this sort always sound as if the presenter has solved all the intractable problems of teaching ESL writing, of course that is not true. I would like to end by raising some points which I have begun to confront but for which I have no permanent solution. They are as follows: is it desirable to mix Americans and international students in the same class at an advanced level? How can I get shy students to participate when they want the teacher to do all the talking? How do I compensate for my lack of expertise in the many fields in which my students write? Although I have no definitive

answer, I would like briefly to take up each of these in turn.

Scheduling problems at UF have forced us to mix American students and international students this spring. For the first time we were allowed to offer a section for native speakers who wanted to improve their writing, but many foreign students could not sign up at the time designated for the international class. So far the experiment has worked well, but I have had to monitor the situation carefully. Juggling the needs of American and international students can be tricky. When Americans give the presentations, the NNS can feel temporarily overwhelmed by their fluency. Yet, in short order the NNS' analytical skills and facility to devise ingenious visual aids has righted the balance.

Not only does mixing seems to benefit both groups, but having American students has given me new ideas for working with the all NNS class. Although I worried initially more about the NNS' participation in the morning class, they talk better than the afternoon group, who are all NNS. To my surprise, the presentations of the NNS have been better in the mixed than in the purely NNS class. Since the latter is not a control group, I do not know exactly why this is so. All I can say is that it has taken the afternoon class longer to take charge of their learning process. By setting more explicit guidelines, however, and encouraging collaborative presentations—ideas I first tried in the mixed group—gradually the all NNS class has improved. At the halfway mark, both groups have increased their respect for the other. It is an experiment that I hope to repeat again in

the near future.

Conferences have been especially important in managing this mixture. I can talk to each student at whatever her level might be. The linguistics students need an opportunity to discuss the implications of my teaching in ways that the others can not. At the same time the NNS often write richer critiques because their prior training has encouraged the development of their analytic skills. By seeing all the students every week, I think I have been able to make sure that their needs will be met.

Finally I know that my inability to judge the content of the writing does limit my usefulness to some students. On one evaluation a student wistfully said, perhaps we could combine this course with content courses, so that an expert could also read his papers. My only response is to say that honesty is the only solution. I stress the point that their advisors are the best judge of their finished products, but at the same time indicate that they are learning how to work more effectively with their advisors by working closely with me. After all, few of the NNS have much idea of how to interact with professors in their courses. In the long run they will be successful if they learn how to develop the kind of collaborative relationship that their professors would like them to experience but have little idea how to create. As a result, I believe that our expertise in developing learning skills may well compensate for our lack of technical knowledge of their fields.

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